

GUIDE TO THE FR5 NGONI FILE

/The name "Ngoni" has political linguistic and ethnic meanings which will be discussed later. Concretely, Ngoni refers to a series of population groups or clusters located mainly in three countries of eastern Africa — Malawi (formerly Nyasaland), where they are found in nearly every sector of the country; Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia); and Tanzania (formerly Tanganyika). Some of the Malawi and Tanzania Ngoni also extend over into Mozambique. Most of these population groups are organized into political states or "kingdoms" of varying size, and they are generally named after the most prominent kings or chiefs who led them on their invasions from the south into their present locales. An inventory of the main groups follows arranged by country. These data are derived primarily from 2: Read and from Mary Tew, Peoples of the Lake Nyasa Region, 1950. The names of countries and political subdivisions are those used in the sources, which were written while these countries were still under British colonial domination.

Nyasaland

- 1) Mbelwa (Mombera) Ngoni, called the "northern Ngoni kingdom" by Read; location: Mzimba district, Northern Province — also extend into Zambia at Lundazi; 1945 population: 44,948 in Mzimba district, 45,539 total according to Tew; main language spoken: Tumbuka.
- 2) Ciwere Ngoni, a minor state evidently settled by Mbelwa Ngoni; location: Dowa district; 1945 population of Dowa district: 20,329; main language spoken: probably Nyanja, the official language of the area.
- 3) Two other minor states — Jere and Msakambewa (?) — also settled by Mbelwa Ngoni; location: Kotakota district mainly (?); 1945 population of Kotakota district: 4,838.
- 4) Gomani Ngoni, called the "Central Ngoni kingdom" by Read; for location and population Read evidently limits herself to the central kingdom proper whereas Tew seems to have included all the Ngoni who can

properly be classified as Gomani, therefore, both sets of data are given; location: Ncheu district, Central Province (Read), Ncheu and Dedza districts plus some extension into other districts and Mozambique (Tew); 1945 population: 15,242 (Read), 29,999 (Tew); main language spoken: Nyanja.

5) Four minor states — Kacindamoto, Kacere, Masula, and Vumbwe (?) — which separated from the central kingdom; location: Dedza, Lilongwe, and Cholo districts; 1945 population by district: Dedza — 14,757, Lilongwe — 17,707, Cholo — 9,185. (Tew probably included some of these people into her Gomani category.)

6) Ngoni of the Blantyre district, Southern Province; 1945 population: 25,224.

Both Tew and Read list the total Ngoni population of Nyasaland as of 1945 to be 193,482.

Northern Rhodesia

1) Mpezeni Ngoni; location: Fort Jameson district in Northern Rhodesia and Fort Manning district in Nyasaland; 1945 population: total of 85,000 — 60,000 in Northern Rhodesia, 25,000 in Nyasaland; main languages spoken: Nsenga is the common language, while Nyanja, which is the official language, is also spoken throughout the Fort Jameson district.

Tanganyika

1) Magwangwara Ngoni; they are divided into a northern and a southern chiefdom; location: Songea and Lindi districts, plus an extension into Mozambique; 1945 population: total of 74,869 — 57,769 in Songea district; main language spoken: Yao.

2) Watuta Ngoni; location: Tabora district; main language spoken: Nyamwezi. The Watuta evidently constitute a small population cluster.

In summary, there are five main Ngoni groups: Mbelwa or Mombera, Ciwere, Gomani, Mpezeni, and Magwangwara. Of these, the three major kingdoms are Mbelwa, Gomani, and Mpezeni, although there does not seem to be enough information about the Magwangwara to evaluate this group properly. At one point, Tew

(1950: 97) says that the Ngoni in Tanganyika were nearly annihilated by the German expeditions.

A good deal of confusion has been caused by the use of the name Ngoni as a tribal designation. Read says that Ngoni is, strictly speaking, an historical linguistic term. The name was assumed originally by a group of sibs who spoke an Nguni dialect, and who split off from the Zulu or Swazi stock in South Africa and migrated northward. "This is the meaning which Ngoni still has when used in its narrow or strict sense today" (9: Read, p. 457). During their northward migration, the Ngoni absorbed elements from many other ethnic groups, so that the present ethnic composition of the Ngoni kingdoms is highly mixed. It is by examining this composition that we may best understand the full range of applications of the name Ngoni. Four categories of people are involved: a) those from the south; b) those from south of the Zambezi; c) those from the march; and d) those from this country. Category (a) consists of the "true" Ngoni, those whose sib descent names show their Zulu/Swazi ancestry. Read claims that contrary to previous information, most of the true Ngoni still speak their traditional language, which she says is almost identical with old Zulu, along with one of the local vernaculars such as Nsenga, Tumbuka, or Nyanja. In fact, use of the Ngoni language is one of the distinguishing marks between the true Ngoni, who are in aristocratic minority in these political groupings, and the rest of the people. The other ethnic components are ranked hierarchically in rough geographic order of their absorption from south to north — again the sib descent names are the crucial classificatory index. Thus people in category (b) who were absorbed south of the Zambezi are ranked higher than those in category (c), while those in category (d) who were the last to be absorbed, and who have usually retained more of their own cultures, are ranked lowest. In her monograph, 2: Read uses the term Ngoni to refer to persons in categories (a) and (b) only, and it is their culture which she describes. In its widest application, however, Ngoni may be used as a political label to refer to all of the people within the political jurisdiction of an Ngoni state; in other words, to persons in all four of the categories listed above.

Mainly through the work of Barnes (cf. especially 1: Barnes), the Ngoni have become a "classic" example in the anthropological literature of a segmenting state system, or what Barnes calls a "snowball state." This means a state which steadily expands and occasionally spins off new states through processes of social fission, the fissioning units in this case being what Barnes calls "residential" units, which meet some but not all the criteria of lineage systems.

The FR5 Ngoni file presently consists of 14 sources, 6 of which focus on the Mpezeni Ngoni, making this the best described group. The basic authority is Barnes, who spent 20 months in 1946-1949 doing fieldwork among the Ngoni of the Fort Jameson district. 1: Barnes is a major analysis of Ngoni sociopolitical history and political processes. 4: Barnes is a fairly thorough study of marriage and kinship, while 10: Barnes is a good general summary of the social organization. 12: Barnes deals with material culture, particularly subsistence, technology, and crafts, whereas 8: Barnes is concerned with legends and oral traditions. 5: Allan covers some otherwise neglected aspects with his data on population, land utilization, and agriculture.

Read is the authority on the Mbelwa and Gomani Ngoni. 2: Read is a thorough general study of social organization, while 3: Read focuses upon the socialization system and cultural values. Read spent three and a half years among the Ngoni of Malawi in 1935-1939. 13: Fraser also deals with the Mbelwa Ngoni as of about 1890, presenting information on their history, social organization, economy, and religion.

9: Read is an excellent, general discussion of the ethnic composition and culture history of the Ngoni, relating mainly to the Mbelwa, Gomani, and Mpezeni Ngoni, and it should provide the researcher with a good introductory perspective to the file.

11: Lancaster also deals with general Ngoni social history based on oral traditions. He covers the period of migrations from South Africa to Zambia and Malawi which lasted from the 1820's through the 1860's.

6: Rattray describes miscellaneous customs, folk-lore, and songs of the Ngoni located mainly in the

Central Province of Nyasaland. And 7: Hodgson consists of ethnographic notes comparing CiwereNgoni customs with those of the Cewa (FR4).

Finally, 14: Rita-Ferreira is an annotated bibliography on the Ngoni./

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